

Opening Statement  
Chairman Mark Souder

“Preserving and Maintaining the National Parks”

Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy,  
and Human Resources  
Committee on Government Reform

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Good morning, and thank you all for joining us. This hearing is the first in a series of hearings about budget and management issues facing the National Park Service given budget shortfalls.

The Committee on Government Reform is the Oversight committee of the United States House of Representatives. As such, it is the mandate and the duty of the Government Reform Committee to scrutinize the workings of the United States Government. House Rule X, clause 4(c)(2) states that the Government Reform Committee may “at any time conduct investigations of any matter without regard to [committee jurisdiction].” The Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources has oversight jurisdiction over the issues outlined in its name as well as a large swath of the Federal Government not explicitly named in its name, including the National Park Service.

The mission of the National Park Service is ***“...to promote and regulate the use of the...national parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”***

In its nearly 90 year history, the National Park Service has grown substantially from 36 units in 1916 to 388 units today. There are 57 units called national parks, the so-called “crown jewels” of the National Park Service. Other commonly used titles

include national historic sites (77), national monuments (74), national historical parks (41), national memorials (29), national recreation areas (18), and national preserves (18). Each unit is distinctive and each unit has its own unique problems and challenges. Moreover, as the National Park Service has grown, the demands on its resources have also grown. This is the first of a series of hearings examining each type of Park Service unit and various aspects of Park operations as they relate to the National Park Service's mission.

The National Park Service is one of the most recognized and appreciated government agencies. Each year millions of people visit the 388 units of the National Park Service. They expect to see the friendly faces of park rangers dressed in their familiar green uniforms greeting them at the gate and assisting them throughout the park.

I began my visits to the National Parks when I was very young. Over my lifetime, I have visited parks all over the country from Alaska to Florida to Hawaii and everywhere in between. My goal is to visit each National Park unit. I have no National Park Service units in my district, but I fight for a better NPS every chance I get.

As a Member of the House Committee on Resources, I have been able to focus a great deal of attention on the National Park Service. Under the capable leadership of Resources Committee Chairman Pombo, the problems facing the NPS have been brought to the attention of the House of Representatives. I hope the fresh perspective my hearing bring to this issue will build on what his committee has accomplished and result in a better National Park Service.

Each and every park is different. Each and every park I have visited tells a different part of the story of the America. Although there are vast differences from park to park, the desire to preserve and protect our natural, cultural, and historic heritage remains constant.

Preservation of our natural, cultural, and historical heritage is of the utmost importance so that future generations will know the history of their country, and be able

to enjoy the natural grandeur of God's creation. As the Park Service budget has come under greater pressure, the parks have suffered. If these pressures continue to grow, I believe that the NPS' ability to adequately achieve their stated mission may be in doubt.

In the recent past, President George W. Bush has devoted more money toward alleviating the maintenance backlog. Congress has boosted NPS funding, particularly in the last Fiscal Year. While this interest in the park system is deeply appreciated, ongoing and constant attention must be paid to this problem.

This series of hearings will examine the NPS' fulfillment of its mission. Over the course of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress this Subcommittee will conduct a series of hearings, both in Washington and around the country, that examine the state of the National Parks, the fulfillment of their mission, and the reasons behind it.

Our plan is to study all kinds of parks in all regions of the country. The hearing at Gettysburg National Military Park will focus on historical parks, particularly Civil War-related units, and parks in this region. We will also look at public-private partnerships.

We have a variety of witnesses here today, including a representative of the National Park Service. Also present are The Honorable Richard Thornburgh of the Gettysburg Museum Foundation, David Booz of the Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg, Joy Oakes of the National Parks Conservation Association, and O. James Lighthizer of the Civil War Preservation Trust.

Joining me today on the dais is Congressman Todd Platts, in whose congressional district we currently sit. He is a Member of the Government Reform Committee, and a great friend of the National Parks. I appreciate his interest in this topic, and his presence here today.